

What a great day to be in the house of the Lord. This is a special day. Number one, this is the day that the Lord has made. We rejoice and are glad in it. It's a special day because we saw Elle and Emerson baptized. It's a special day because this is mine and Kelly's wedding anniversary, 18 years that Kelly's put up with me today. Today, I decided that I was going to make sure that Kelly woke up with a big smile on her face this morning, and as a result, we are no longer allowed to have Sharpies in the house. Anyway. Happy anniversary, Kelly.

If you were here last week, we heard an urgent message warning us of the brief time that we're on this Earth and how we must all be faithful to share the message of Christ with our lost family members and friends and coworkers and neighbors. Also, a challenge was issued for us to get our lives in order or to get our houses in order because none of us are promised tomorrow. It's my prayer that if you're here today, there would be an urgency. This past Wednesday night, I was talking to one of our church members, David Nance, who said, "Todd, this Sunday's sermon is more urgent than last Sunday's." Well, I just looked at him and he said, "Because we're one week closer to the return of Jesus Christ. We're one week closer to the end of our lives." I agree with David.

With every passing day, there is more of an urgency to do what the Lord is leading you and me to do. I pray today that we would respond as the Holy Spirit leads. In our Scripture passage today, we see Peter preaching that first Spirit-filled message. Actually, the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Ironically, this message was prompted by a scoffing, careless comment when someone said, "They have had too much wine to drink." As a result, Peter began to share with them about the gift of the Holy Spirit that had come, reminding them of what the prophet Joel had foretold or had predicted in Joel 2:29 when he said, "In the last days, God says that people will have the Holy Spirit poured out on them. 'I will pour out my Spirit on all the people.'"

Then Peter, right away, issued an immediate command to those who would respond. If you read in verse 37 of Acts 2, it said that the people were cut to the heart. You know what that means? They were convicted. After they were cut to the heart, they said to the apostles and to Peter, "Brothers, what shall we do?" It's my prayer that today, before this service is over, you would respond by saying, "What would you have us to do, Lord? What is it that you want me to do to start living my life differently than I'm living it now?" The message was as urgent today as it was when Peter preached this Spirit-filled message, and the first thing he said we need to do is repent in verse 38, to repent.

What does it mean to repent? To repent means to have a change of mind or to turn away from something or someone. Repentance should prompt a change of action. We should have a radical change in our lives that would change us morally, ethically, spiritually. I mean, when we repent, we have a change of attitude toward God, toward sin, toward the world, toward ourselves. We stop trusting in ourselves and we place our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance was the message that John the Baptist preached in Matthew 3:2. John the Baptist said, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near." Jesus in Matthew 4:17, after being baptized, Jesus preached from that time on, "Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near."

What does that mean, the kingdom of Heaven is near? It's referring to God's authority. It's a present reality and a future hope. The authority of God is near. As a result, we're supposed to repent. How many of you are here today and you claim to be Christian, a follower of Christ, yet you're still doing the same old stuff that you did before you gave your life to Christ? You're continuing to live in disobedience. You're continuing to live in sin. Nothing's changed. You've said, "I confess Christ," but yet there's not

really been any change. You haven't wanted to be inconvenienced. You don't want to feel uncomfortable, so you continue to live the same old life.

Maybe you're here today and we need to repent from a hindering sin. Might be anger towards someone. It might be unforgiveness. Might be a jealousy or envy. It might be a critical negative spirit. It might be dissension, but maybe you are to turn away. It might be an addiction. You gave your life to Christ but you continue to be addicted to substance or something. Well, Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:31, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice." Today you need to repent from a hindering sin. Or maybe you're here today and you need to repent from hypocrisy.

What is hypocrisy? It's pretending to be something that you are not. You put on a front or an act when you're with this group of people, but yet when you're with this group of people, you act totally different. You know, people are not always who they pretend to be. I love the story that Greg Laurie told that I shared many years ago from his book, *The Upside-Down Church*. In that book he shared a story about a man who is desperate for money. He went down to the city zoo and he begged for a job to feed the animals. There they told him, "Sorry, we don't have any positions open." Before letting him go, the zookeeper noticed that he was a good-sized man and he said, "Well, actually, our leading attraction, our number one exhibit, the gorilla exhibit, passed away last week. Would you be willing to wear a gorilla suit for a few days and we'll pay you very, very well for this job?"

The man was so desperate, he agreed. For several days, that man wore that gorilla suit and he shook the bars of that cage and he beat his chest. Crowds gathered. People were in awe. The money was good. Then one day he was swinging on the trapeze and he flung himself. His hands came loose and he landed in the lion's cage. That lion gave a ferocious roar and that man thought, "What am I going to do? I can't cry out for help or I'll reveal that I'm a fake." He began to tiptoe backward and that lion kept coming forward with a hungry look on his face. Finally the man could stand it no longer. He said, "Help! Help!" The lion whispered, "Shut up, man, or you're going to cause us both to lose our job."

I tell you, it's not always what you think. But maybe today you need to repent from your hypocrisy, or maybe you're here today and you need to repent from the hurt that you placed upon others. Paul Powell, in his book *Church Today*, said that "there are so many caustic, critical, and judgmental people in God's church." That's the truth. That's across the board, not just in church. But the church is included. There are a lot of people that cause hurt or critical or judgmental spirit in the church. Went on to say, "Sometimes the church has been guilty of shooting our wounded instead of helping them heal." That's why many times we refer to this church as a filled hospital for the sin-sick and hurting, not a club for the righteous.

We are a place where the sick can come and be made whole. Really, repentance is something that our whole nation needs. If there was ever a time for us to repent and turn away from the things of this world, it would be today. I'm reminded of that prayer that the Lord spoke to Solomon in 2 Chronicles 7:14. "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land." If there was ever a prayer for us to pray to turn from our wicked ways and begin to place our faith and trust in the Lord, how do we do that?

We have the power of the Holy Spirit available to us that lives inside of us. When Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do everything, all things, through Christ who gives me strength," he was referring to the

Spirit. We can have victory over things we never dreamed we would have victory over. We can resist things we never thought possible to resist because of the Holy Spirit. I've shared this story. Many years ago, when we were still over at the Chapel at the Little Church, we were just experiencing God's great growth and we were just underway with the building program. There was a sweet lady who'd been a member of this church 50-some years.

One Sunday she said, "Brother Todd, would you come to my house this week and pray over me and anoint me with oil? Do you anoint people with oil?" I said, "Yes, ma'am, I do." She said, "Would you come?" I remember it like it was yesterday, going to her house. We went out on the back porch and she said, as serious as can be, she said, "Brother Todd, I've got a demon that I struggle with. I've struggled with this demon for years." I said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "Brother Todd, I know it's terrible for me, but I smoke and I not only smoke, but I smoke a lot. Would you pray that God would deliver me from my addiction, this demon of smoking?" I said, "Yes, ma'am, I sure will."

I remember seeing her like yesterday. I anointed her forehead with some olive oil, some symbol oil, a symbol of God's power, and placed the cross on her head. She lifted both hands straight in the air and I said, "Deliver my dear sister in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Cast out this demon from her body and give her freedom and victory." I praise God that God delivered her. But not long after that, cancer took her life. But I remember after she prayed, she said, "Brother Todd, I've been wanting to ask you." Y'all remember me sharing this story. Again, we were already underway with this building program. She said, "I've been meaning to ask you. How big are you building that church over there?"

I said, "Well, ma'am, you know, the sanctuary is going to seat 850 to 1000. Pretty good size." She started going, "Mm. Mm." I thought, "You know, she had been a part of the Little Church for years. Probably was going to be against." She said, "Mm, you're not building it big enough." It kind of caught me off-guard. I looked up and she said, "I had in mind about 3000. How many came to Christ and were baptized after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost?" I said, "Well, around 3000." She goes, "That's what I was thinking." When Ruth Verner passed away, I shared that story at her funeral, that she believed that God could deliver her from that demon.

Do you believe today that God can deliver you from your demon? You better believe that He can. God is still in the business of setting people free. God is still in the business of saving people that call upon His name. The message was imminent. The message was immediate. He said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Not only did He say, "Have a change of heart, change of mind, change of direction, a radical change in your total being," but He said, "Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."

I love that David Jeremiah said that "baptism is an outward demonstration of the reality of the person of Jesus Christ in each life." It's an outward demonstration of the inward reality of the person of Jesus Christ in each of our lives. Today we baptized people because Jesus Himself was baptized in Matthew 3. Why was Jesus baptized? Jesus was the only sinless person ever to live. He was the only person who never committed sin. Why would Jesus ask John to baptize Him in the Jordan River? Well, number one, it was to fulfill all righteousness. Do you remember after Jesus was baptized, He came out of the water and the Holy Spirit came in the form of a dove and He heard the Father say, "This is my Son, whom I love, and I am well pleased?"

Man, if it pleased God that Jesus was baptized, don't you think it pleases God when we're baptized? I think it does. Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. He had consecrated, committed Himself to His Father's plan. But then He also was baptized because John was announcing the arrival of the Messiah and the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. But He was also baptized to identify with our sin and our failure. He wanted us to know that He understands and He was identifying with our sin and failure. But then He did it to set an example for you and for me. He was setting an example that we, too, need to be baptized.

When it says "for the forgiveness of your sins," it could be rendered "because of." We are baptized not as a requirement for salvation. We are baptized because of our salvation. I'm so grateful today that we are baptized because Jesus was and He also, in the Great Commission before ascending into Heaven, said in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you, and surely I am with you always even to the end of the age." It's possible that some of you have been coming to this church for years and you've never followed through with Believer's Baptism.

Baptism is identifying with the local body of Christ, the body of believers. It's an outward symbol of our inside faith. We are buried with Christ. We're identifying with Christ. We are buried with Christ in baptism. The old person is being buried. The sin is symbolically being washed away. Then we rise to walk in newness of life. It means one day when we die and buried, we'll rise to be with Jesus in eternity. That's why we baptize. It's saying, "I'm not ashamed of Jesus, who was not ashamed to die for me." The message Peter preached that day, that Spirit-filled, was Christ-centered. It was about the life, the death, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the imminent presence of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

That's what we are called to do. Some of you are here today and you've been coming forever and you say, "Well, I just"- You might have an excuse. I had one lady to tell me one time the reason she didn't want to get baptized is because her ears stuck out when her hair was wet. You think I'm playing. That's the truth. "My ears stick out when my hair's wet." I said, "Mine stick out all the time." Others have said, "I'm afraid of the water." When I was baptized, I didn't know how to swim yet, yet I was baptized in Elkhorn Creek. My brother, Tim, and I were baptized by my brother, Terry. We were the first two he had baptized as an ordained minister. I remember like it was yesterday on that hot August evening when I made my public profession and declaration and was baptized in the waters.

You know what? It's saying, "I'm not ashamed of Jesus. He's not ashamed of me." If you haven't followed through with baptism, what's stopping you? Are you scared of what people will think? Are you scared of the change that might take place? Because He said after you're baptized, you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. At the moment we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit comes into us. He is the one that will guide us and protect us and convict us and change us to be the people God would want us to be. I pray today that if you're putting it off, you will stop putting it off before it's too late. Repent and be baptized.

Then if you would read on, Peter said, "Save yourself from this corrupt generation." Then those who accepted the message were baptized, about 3000. About 3000 were baptized that day. It's a beautiful picture, isn't it? This past Wednesday night, if you were here, I shared with you that last week, when one of our children came forward at the 8:30 service who had made a profession of faith, one of our children in the church came with their mother and this young man and his dad were going to be baptized at the creek tonight. The wife said, "Todd, I'm praying that my aunt and my cousin's wife are going to be baptized, too. They've never made a profession of faith and I'm praying that they will."

After she told me that, those two ladies were here. After the 8:30 service, they were coming through the line to welcome their family and others that have made commitments for the Lord. I felt a boldness after preaching on the urgency. I said, "Ladies, I would like to speak with you this week." They both looked at me and each other like, "What you talking about, Willis?" I said, "Would y'all meet with me?" They said, "Sure." They came to my office, 4:00 Wednesday, and I praised God that this mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law both prayed to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior and they're both going to be baptized at the creek tonight with their other family members. Praise the Lord. It's okay.

Few weeks ago before I left on vacation, I had a man that wanted to meet with me. I didn't recognize the name. I never knew him. He said he wanted to come meet with me. I met with this gentlemen. He walked in the cross center and he's never been to a service, but he's walked in the cross center. He's got a mom that attends here. Well, he wanted to meet with me. After meeting with me, he said, "Todd, I was sprinkled as a child in another denomination. I've lived a lot of life and done a lot of things I'm not proud of since then. I'm really feeling led to have a fresh start. I'd like to join this church, but I'd like to follow through the waters of baptism." I said, "Man, I would be humbled. I would be honored."

We set up a time this past Thursday at 11:00 Thursday morning. My friend came. It was just he and I. His family was out of town, had other plans. But we got up in that baptistry and I asked him, "Is Jesus Christ his Lord" and he said, "Yes, yes He is." I baptized him. He came out. He said, "I've needed to do this a long time. I'm so grateful." He's starting a new business in town. He said, "I feel like I've got a fresh start." Maybe that's where you are today. God wants to give you a fresh start, a new beginning. That's why Jesus came into the world while we were still sinners. Christ Jesus died for us so that we might not have to pay the penalty that we deserve.

God wants to save you today and He wants you to repent whether you're a Christian or you've not received Him. We've got to turn away from those things that we know are not God-honoring or not pleasing and start walking toward the Savior while we have time. Today would be a beautiful time for you to make a public profession, a declaration, of your faith, not to be ashamed. Jesus said, "If you're ashamed of me before men, I will be ashamed of you when you come before my Father. But if you're not ashamed of me before men, I will not be ashamed of you when you come before the Father." We are not to be ashamed of Jesus Christ, who died and then rose from the grave to show us we have life and life everlasting.

In a moment we're going to sing a hymn of invitation and I pray that you would respond to the urgent call that God has given today for us to repent and be baptized. Every one of you, because of the forgiveness that we've received through Christ. Aren't you ready as we pray? O Father, I pray right now in the stillness of this moment that if there are any folks here today, any men or women or young people or children, that maybe they've been thinking about it, they've been praying about it, they've been talking a long time, but now today is the day. No more excuses. No more waiting. Today is the day that we give our hearts and lives fully surrendered to Jesus. We repent and we come to Jesus and we follow through the waters of baptism.

O God, may this be the day that many would come to salvation. Lord, I pray that if there are those that have been visiting this church and they feel your Holy Spirit and they want to be a part of the good work you have begun in this place and the waters are stirring and they want to jump in while the Spirit is moving, may this be the day. Lord, maybe Christians want to come pray at this altar. They want to start living the kind of life that a Christian should live. Quit trying to fake this person out, fake this person out,

but they would be authentic and real in their faith and relationship with you. God, just lead us right now. Here we are, and we just commit to you in Jesus' name. Amen.